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CHILD'S PAY

Child tax credit starts hitting U.S. families' bank accounts



President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris wave to children in the crowd during an event to mark the start of monthly Child Tax Credit relief payments, in the South Court Auditorium on the White House complex, Thursday, July 15, 2021, in Washington.

Associated Press
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Child tax credit starts hitting U.S. families' bank accounts

By JOSH BOAK

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The child tax credit had always been an empty gesture to millions of parents like Tamika Daniel.

That changed Thursday when the first payment of \$1,000 hit Daniel's bank account — and dollars started flowing to the pockets of more than 35 million families around the country. Daniel, a 35-year-old mother of four, didn't even know the tax credit existed until President Joe Biden expanded it for one year as part of the \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief package that passed in March.

Previously, only people who earned enough money to owe income taxes could qualify for the credit. Daniel went nearly a decade without a job because her eldest son is autistic and needed her. So she got by on Social Security payments. And she had to live at Fairfield Courts, a public housing project that dead-ends at Interstate 64 as the highway cuts through the Virginia capital of Richmond.

But the extra \$1,000 a month for the next year could be a life-changer for Daniel, who now works as a community organizer for a Richmond nonprofit. It will help provide a security deposit on a new apartment. "It's actually coming right on time," she said. "We have a lot going on. This definitely helps to take a load off."

Biden has held out the new monthly payments, which will average \$423 per family, as the key to halving child poverty rates. But he is also setting up a broader philosophical battle about the role of government and the responsibilities of parents.

Democrats see this as a landmark program along the same lines as Social Security, saying it will lead to better outcomes in adulthood that will help economic growth. But many Republicans warn that the payments will discourage parents from working and ultimately feed into long-



Tamika Daniel poses for a photo in Richmond, Va., Thursday, July 15, 2021. Daniel, a 35-year-old mother of four, will start receiving the Child Tax Credit on Thursday.

Associated Press

term poverty.

Some 15 million households will now receive the full credit. The monthly payments amount to \$300 for each child who is 5 and younger and \$250 for those between 5 and 17. The payments are set to lapse after a year, but Biden is pushing to extend them through at least 2025.

The president ultimately would like to make the payments permanent — and that makes this first round of payments a test as to whether the government can improve the lives of families.

Biden invited beneficiaries to the White House to mark the first round of payments, saying in a Thursday speech that the day carried a historic resonance because of the boost it will give families across the nation.

"This would be the largest ever one-year decrease in child poverty in the history of the United States of America," the president said. "Millions of children and their families, starting today, their lives are about to change for the better. And our country would be better off for it as well."

Florida Republican Sen. Marco Rubio, who successfully championed increasing the credit in 2017, said that the Democrats' plans

will turn the benefits into an "anti-work welfare check" because almost every family can now qualify for the payment regardless of whether the parents have a job.

"Not only does Biden's plan abandon incentives for marriage and requirements for work, but it will also destroy the child-support enforcement system as we know it by sending cash payments to single parents without ensuring child-support orders are established," Rubio said in a statement Wednesday.

The administration disputed those claims. Treasury Department estimates indicate that 97% of recipients of the tax credit have wages or self-employment income, while the other 3% are grandparents or have health issues. The credit also starts to phase out at \$150,000 for joint filers, so there is no disincentive for the poor to work because a job would just give them more income.

Colorado Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet said the problem is one of inequality. He said that economic growth has benefited the top 10% of earners in recent decades, while families are struggling with the rising costs of housing, child care and health care. He said his voters back in Colorado

are concerned that their children will be poorer than previous generations and that requires the expansion of the child tax credit.

"It's the most progressive change to America's tax code ever," Bennet told reporters.

Parenthood is an expensive undertaking. The Agriculture Department estimated in 2017, the last year it published such a report, that a typical family spends \$233,610 to raise a child from birth to the age of 17. But wealthier children get far more invested in their education and upbringing, while poorer children face a constant disadvantage. Families in the top third of incomes spend about \$10,000 more annually per child than families in the lower third.

The child tax credit was created in 1997 to be a source of relief, yet it also became a driver of economic and racial inequality as only parents who owed the federal government taxes could qualify for its full payment. Academic research in 2020 found that about three-quarters of white and

Asian children were eligible for the full credit, but only about half of Black and Hispanic children qualified.

In the census tract where Daniel lives in Richmond, the median household income is \$14,725 —almost five times lower than the national median. Three out of every 4 children live in poverty. For a typical parent with two children in that part of Richmond, the expanded tax credit would raise income by almost 41%.

The tax credit is as much about keeping people in the middle class as it is about lifting up the poor.

Katie Strelka, of Brookfield, Wisconsin, was laid off from her job as a beauty and hair care products buyer for the Kohl's department store chain in September as the pandemic tightened its grip on the country. She and her sons, 3-year-old Oliver and 7-year-old Robert, were left to depend on her husband's income as a consultant for retirement services. The family was already struggling to pay for her husband's kidney transplant five years earlier and his ongoing therapies before she was laid off, she said.

With no job prospects, Strelka reenrolled in college to study social work in February. Last month she landed a new job as an assistant executive director for the nonprofit International Association for Orthodontics. Now she needs day care again.

That amounts to \$1,000 a week for both kids.

All the tax credit money will go to cover that, said Strelka, 37.

"Every little bit is going to help right now," she said. "I'm paying for school out-of-pocket. I'm paying for the boys' stuff. The cost of food and everything else has gone up. We're just really thankful. The tide feels like it's turning." □

Surgeon general urges U.S. fight against COVID misinformation

By DAVID KLEPPER

Associated Press

U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy on Thursday called for a national effort to fight misinformation about COVID-19 and vaccines, urging tech companies, health care workers, journalists and everyday Americans to do more to address an "urgent threat" to public health. In a 22-page advisory, his first as President Joe Biden's surgeon general, Murthy wrote that bogus claims have led people to reject vaccines and public health advice on masks and social distancing, undermining efforts to end the coronavirus pandemic and putting lives at risk. The warning comes as the pace of COVID-19 vaccinations has slowed throughout the U.S., in part because of vaccine opposition fueled by unsubstantiated claims about the safety of immunizations and despite the U.S. death toll recently passing 600,000.

Murthy, who also served as surgeon general under President Barack Obama, noted that surgeon general advisories have typically focused on physical threats to health, such as tobacco. Misinformation about COVID-19, deemed an "infodemic" by the World Health Organization, can



Surgeon General Dr. Vivek Murthy speaks during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington, Thursday, July 15, 2021.

Associated Press

be just as deadly, he said. "Misinformation poses an imminent and insidious threat to our nation's health," Murthy said during remarks to reporters Thursday at the White House. "We must confront misinformation as a nation. Lives are depending on it." Given the role the internet plays in spreading health misinformation, Murthy said technology companies and social media platforms must make meaningful changes to their products and software to reduce the

spread of misinformation while increasing access to authoritative, fact-based sources. Too often, he said, the platforms are built to encourage, not counter, the spread of misinformation. "We are asking them to step up," Murthy said. "We can't wait longer for them to take aggressive action." The criticism is not new, and Facebook, YouTube, Twitter and other platforms have defended their work to stem the tide of misinformation. In a response to

Murthy, Twitter noted that it has removed more than 40,000 pieces of content that violated its COVID-19 misinformation rules.

"We agree with the surgeon general," Twitter said in a statement. "Tackling health misinformation takes a whole-of-society approach."

Murthy's recommendations went beyond tech firms. Teachers, he said, should expand lessons on media literacy and critical thinking. Journalists, he suggested, should work to

responsibly debunk health misinformation without inadvertently spreading it further. And public health professionals, he added, should do a better job answering questions and explaining why public health guidelines sometimes change based on new information.

As for everyday Americans, Murthy urged them to verify questionable health information with trusted sources like the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and to exercise critical thinking when exposed to unverified claims. If people have loved ones or friends who believe or spread misinformation, he said, it's best to engage by listening and asking questions rather than by confronting them.

While some groups that push health misinformation do so for profit or other motives, many Americans may be spreading false information without realizing it, according to the advisory.

"Misinformation hasn't just harmed our physical health — it has also divided our families, friends, and communities," Murthy wrote in the advisory. "The only way to address health misinformation is to recognize that all of us, in every sector of society, have a responsibility to act." □

\$10 million rewards bolster White House anti-ransomware bid

By FRANK BAJAK

AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The State Department will offer rewards up to \$10 million for information leading to the identification of anyone engaged in foreign state-sanctioned malicious cyber activity, including ransomware attacks, against critical U.S. infrastructure. A task force set up by the White House will coordinate efforts to stem the ransomware scourge.

The Biden administration is also out with a website, stopransomware.gov, that offers the public resources for countering the threat and building more resilience

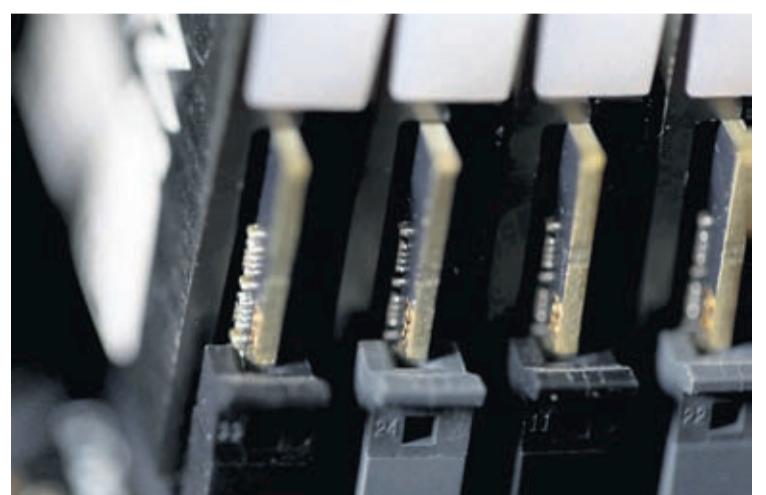
into networks, a senior administration official told reporters.

In another move Thursday, the Treasury Department's Financial Crimes Enforcement Network will work with banks, technology companies and others on better anti-money-laundering efforts for cryptocurrency and more rapid tracing of ransomware proceeds, which are paid in virtual currency.

The rewards come from the State Department's Rewards for Justice program. It will offer a tips-reporting mechanism on the dark web to protect sources who might identify cyber

attackers and/or their locations, and reward payments may include cryptocurrency, the agency said in a statement.

The administration official would not comment on whether the U.S. government had a hand in Tuesday's online disappearance of REvil, the Russian-linked gang responsible for a July 2 supply chain ransomware attack that crippled well over 1,000 organizations globally by targeting Florida-based software provider Kaseya. Ransomware scrambles entire networks of data, which criminals unlock when they get paid.



This Feb 23, 2019, file photo shows the inside of a computer in Jersey City, N.J.

Associated Press

Cybersecurity experts say REvil may have decided to drop out of sight and rebrand under a new name, as it and several other ransomware gangs have done in the past to try to throw off law enforcement.

Another possibility is that Russian President Vladimir Putin actually heeded President Joe Biden's warning of repercussions if he didn't rein in ransomware criminals, who enjoy safe harbor in Russia and allied states. □

1st female sailor completes Navy special warfare training

By LOLITA C. BALDOR

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For the first time, a female sailor has successfully completed the grueling 37-week training course to become a Naval Special Warfare combatant-craft crewman — the boat operators who transport Navy SEALs and conduct their own classified missions at sea.

Navy officials said they would not identify the woman or provide more details on her — a routine military policy for special operations forces. She was one of 17 sailors to graduate and receive their pins on Thursday. She is also the first of 18 women who have tried out for a job as a SWCC or a SEAL to succeed.

The sailor's graduation marks just the latest inroad that women have made into some of the military's most difficult and competitive commando jobs — just five years after all combat posts were opened to them. She will now head to one of Naval Special Warfare's three special boat teams.

"Becoming the first female to graduate from a Naval Special Warfare training pipeline is an extraordinary accomplishment and we are incredibly proud of our teammate," said Rear Adm. H.W. Howard III, the commander of Naval Special Warfare. "Like her fellow operators, she dem-



In this May 4, 2020 photo provided by the U.S. Navy, SEAL candidates participating in "surf immersion" during Basic Underwater Demolition/SEAL (BUD/S) training at the Naval Special Warfare (NSW) Center in Coronado, Calif.

Associated Press

onstrated the character, cognitive and leadership attributes required to join our force."

"She and her fellow graduates have the opportunity to become experts in clandestine special operations, as well as manned and unmanned platforms to deliver distinctive capabilities to our Navy, and the joint force in defense of the nation," Howard added.

Of the 18 females who have sought a Navy special operations job, 14 did not complete the course. Three of them, however, are currently still in the training pipeline, one for SWCC and two attempting to be-

come SEALs. Overall, according to the Navy, only about 35 percent of the men and women who begin the training for SWCC actually graduate.

A year ago, a female soldier became the first woman to complete the Army's elite Special Forces course and join one of the all-male Green Beret teams. One other female soldier has finished training and will report to her assigned Special Forces group next month, and another will be attending the Military Freefall School next month, and then will report to her team. So far, no women have successfully completed

Marine special operations training. Marine spokesman Maj. Hector Infante said that since August 2016, nine females have attempted to get through the assessment and selection process. He said two candidates made it through the second phase, but didn't meet performance expectations and, along with a number of male counterparts, didn't get selected to continue.

He said that only about 40 percent of the more than 1,200 Marines who went through the course since 2016 successfully completed it.

Air Force Lt. Col. Malinda

Singleton said that at the end of this month, there are two enlisted females in the Air Force Special Warfare training pipeline for combat jobs that opened to women in 2015. One has completed the assessment and selection course and will be eligible for an assignment in a special operations job as soon as she finishes some final training. The other woman is in the preparatory course and hasn't yet made it to the assessment phase.

While Navy SEALs often grab the headlines for high-risk missions, the crew that operate the boats and weapons systems during raids and classified operations also go through an extensive selection and training process.

The training to become a combatant craft crewman comes after the Navy's initial recruit boot camp, and includes a two-month preparatory course, a three-week orientation at the Naval Special Warfare Center in Coronado, Calif., and seven weeks where they learn basic navigation and water skill, as well as physical conditioning and safety.

At the end of those seven weeks is a 72-hour crucible called "The Tour." That event — which tests their grit and physical toughness — is the most frequent point of failure for the candidates. □



A crowd of people wait in line outside the U.S. Passport Agency, Thursday July 15, 2021, in St. Albans, Vt.

By LISA RATHKE

Associated Press

ST. ALBANS, Vt. (AP) — The U.S. Passport Agency ended its no appointment

Associated Press

walk-in service at its Vermont's office after it was overwhelmed by people seeking the documents amid a backlog of 1.5 mil-

U.S. Passport Agency ends walk-in service at Vermont office

lion requests nationwide, the State Department said Thursday.

Dozens of desperate travelers from throughout the Northeast had been traveling to the St. Albans office after getting word people could get passports on the spot and struggling to make appointments at other offices. The Vermont Passport Agency had been offering appointment slots from no-shows to last-minute customers on its premises, the State Department said in a statement on Thursday.

More than 20 people, including small children, were waiting outside the Vermont office Thursday despite the policy change.

"I think it's unfair that you're going to change your policy overnight and not notify anybody," said Dina Singh who arrived in Vermont at 5:30 a.m. on Thursday after driving overnight from New York with her husband and their 5-year-old daughter. Singh said her family is supposed to fly out on Friday for a trip with other relatives, including grandparents, to

St. Martin and had been trying for weeks to get an appointment in New York without success.

On Wednesday, the State Department said that the wait for a passport is now between 12 weeks and 18 weeks, even if people pay for expedited processing. That's because of ripple effects from the coronavirus pandemic that caused extreme disruptions to the process at domestic issuance facilities and overseas embassies and consulates. □

Over 50 dead, dozens missing as severe floods strike Europe

By FRANK JORDANS

Associated Press

BERLIN (AP)— More than 50 people have died and dozens were missing Thursday as heavy flooding in Germany and Belgium turned streams and streets into raging torrents that swept away cars and caused houses to collapse.

Recent storms across parts of western Europe made rivers and reservoirs burst their banks, triggering flash floods overnight after the saturated soil couldn't absorb any more water.

"I grieve for those who have lost their lives in this disaster," German Chancellor Angela Merkel said during a visit to Washington, expressing shock at the scope of the flooding. "We still don't know the number. But it will be many."

She pledged that everything would be done to find those still missing, adding: "'Heavy rain and flooding' doesn't capture what happened."

Authorities in North Rhine-Westphalia state said at least 30 people had died, while 19 deaths were reported in Rhineland-Palatinate state to the south. Belgian media reported eight deaths in that country.

Among the worst-hit German villages was Schuld, where several homes collapsed and dozens of people remained unaccounted for.

Rescue operations were hampered by blocked roads and phone and internet outages across the Eifel, a volcanic region of rolling hills and small valleys. Some villages were reduced to rubble as old brick and timber houses couldn't withstand the sudden rush of water, often carrying trees and other debris as it gushed through narrow streets.

Karl-Heinz Grimm, who had come to help his parents in Schuld, said he had never seen the small Ahr River surge in such a deadly torrent.

"This night, it was like madness," he said.

Dozens of people had to be rescued from the roofs

of their houses with inflatable boats and helicopters. Hundreds of soldiers were deployed to assist in the rescue efforts.

"There are people dead, there are people missing, there are many who are

Major highways were inundated in southern and eastern parts of the country, and the railway said all trains were halted.

In Liege, a city of 200,000, the Meuse River overflowed its banks Thursday and the

paid tribute to them and pledged swift help for those affected.

"We don't know the extent of the damage yet, but we won't leave the communities, the people affected alone," he said during a



A car floats in the Meuse River during heavy flooding in Liege, Belgium, Thursday, July 15, 2021.
Associated Press

still in danger," the governor of Rhineland-Palatinate state, Malu Dreyer, told the regional parliament. "We have never seen such a disaster. It's really devastating."

The 52nd Civil Engineer squadron and several volunteers from the U.S. air base at Spangdahlem filled and distributed hundreds of sandbags to help protect homes and businesses in the area, the U.S. European Command said. In Belgium, the Vesdre River spilled over its banks and sent water churning through the streets of Pepinster, near Liege, where a rescue operation by firefighters went wrong when a small boat capsized and three elderly people disappeared.

"Unfortunately, they were quickly engulfed," said Mayor Philippe Godin. "I fear they are dead."

In Verviers, the prosecutor's office said several bodies had been found but could not confirm local media reports that four people were killed there.

mayor asked people living nearby to move to higher ground.

European Union Commission President Ursula von der Leyen pledged to help, tweeting: "My thoughts are with the families of the victims of the devastating floods in Belgium, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands and those who have lost their homes." The full extent of the damage was still unclear, with many villages cut off by floods and landslides that made roads impassable. Videos on social media showed cars floating down streets and houses partially collapsed.

Many of the dead were only discovered after floodwaters receded.

Authorities in the Rhine-Sieg county south of Cologne ordered the evacuation of several villages below the Steinbach reservoir amid fears a dam could break. Two firefighters died in rescue operations in North-Rhine Westphalia, Germany's most populous state. Gov. Armin Laschet

visit to the city of the flood-hit city of Hagen.

Laschet, a conservative who is running to succeed Merkel as chancellor in this fall's election, said the unusually heavy storms and an earlier heat wave could be linked to climate change.

Political opponents have criticized Laschet, the son of a miner, for supporting the region's coal industry and hampering the expansion of wind power during his tenure.

Stefan Rahmstorf, a professor of ocean physics at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research, said it was unclear whether the extreme rainfall seen in Germany was a direct result of planetary warming.

"But one can state that such events are becoming more frequent due to global warming," he told The Associated Press, noting that warmer air can absorb more water vapor that eventually falls as rain.

"The increase in heavy rain and decrease in days with weak rain is now also

clearly seen in observational data, especially in the mid-northern latitudes, which includes Germany," Rahmstorf said.

The weakening of the summer circulation of the atmosphere, causing longer-lasting weather patterns such as heat waves or continuous rain, might also play a role, he added.

Rainfall eased later Thursday across Germany, although water levels on the Mosel and Rhine rivers were expected to continue rising.

In the Netherlands, King Willem-Alexander and his wife, Queen Maxima, visited the hard-hit Dutch town of Valkenburg on Thursday evening to support residents and emergency services. Flooding turned the main street into a torrent of brown water, inundating homes and businesses.

The Dutch government sent about 70 troops to the southern province of Limburg late Wednesday to help with evacuations and filling sandbags. Authorities said they expect to evacuate homes near swollen rivers Friday as water from Germany and Belgium churns through the Netherlands.

In northeastern France, heavy rains flooded vegetable fields, many homes and a World War I museum in Romagne-sous-Montfaucon.

Firefighters evacuated people from campgrounds around the town of Fresnes-en-Woëvre, according to the local firefighter service. Bastille Day fireworks were canceled in some small towns.

The Aire River rose to its highest levels in 30 years in some areas, according to local newspaper L'Est Républicain. The equivalent of two months of rain has fallen in some areas over two days, according to the French national weather service, with flood warnings issued for 10 regions.

No injuries or deaths have been reported, but forecasters warned of mudslides and more rain on Friday. □

25,000 troops deployed to quell South Africa riots, 117 dead

By ANDREW MELDRUM and MOGOMOTSI MAGOME
Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — South Africa's army began deploying 25,000 troops Thursday to assist police in quelling weeklong riots sparked by the imprisonment of former President Jacob Zuma. At least 117 people have been killed in the violence, authorities said.

In one of the largest deployments of soldiers since the end of white minority rule in 1994, the government said 10,000 soldiers were on the streets by Thursday morning and the South African National Defence Force has also called up all of its reserve force of 12,000 troops.

In a show of force, a convoy of more than a dozen armored personnel carriers brought soldiers Thursday into Gauteng province, South Africa's most populous, which includes the largest city, Johannesburg, and the capital, Pretoria. Buses, trucks, airplanes and helicopters were also being used to move the large deployment of troops to trouble spots in Gauteng and



South African Defence Force soldiers on patrol alongside the male single sex hostels in Alexandra Township, north of Johannesburg, Thursday, July 15 2021.

Associated Press

KwaZulu-Natal province that have seen a week of violence in mainly poor areas.

The violence erupted last week after Zuma began serving a 15-month sentence for contempt of court for refusing to comply with a court order to testify at a state-backed inquiry investigating allega-

tions of corruption while he was president from 2009 to 2018.

The protests in Gauteng and KwaZulu-Natal escalated into a spree of theft in township areas, although it has not spread to South Africa's seven other provinces, where police are on alert.

More than 2,200 people

have been arrested for theft and vandalism and 117 have died, Khumbudzo Ntshavheni, acting minister in the presidency said Thursday. Many of those killed were trampled in chaotic stampedes when shops were being looted, according to police.

The armed patrols have brought stability to

Gauteng, South Africa's most populous province, which includes Johannesburg, the country's largest city. Army troops stood guard at the large Maponya mall in Soweto, which was one of the few retail centers not badly hit by the rampaging but remained closed.

Volunteer groups cleaned up shattered glass and debris from shops that had been stormed and looted in Johannesburg's Soweto, Alexandra and Vosloorus areas.

"I spoke to some of the guys who are unemployed in my area to come and help. The mayor supported us with transport to get here. We came here with two buses," said George Moswetsa, a resident of Vosloorus in eastern Johannesburg who was helping to clean up a mall that had been trashed. The unrest, however, continued Thursday in KwaZulu-Natal, Zuma's home province. There were renewed attacks on shopping centers and several factories and warehouses were smoldering after being hit by arson attacks. □

China says U.S. measures on Xinjiang threaten global trade

By JOE McDONALD
AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — China's government rejected U.S. accusations of forced labor in Xinjiang and accused Washington on Thursday of hurting global trade after lawmakers endorsed import curbs and American companies were warned they face legal risks if they do business with the region.

The measures add to rising pressure on companies that buy clothing, cotton, tomatoes and other goods from Xinjiang, where the ruling Communist Party is accused of holding more than 1 million members of mostly Muslim ethnic groups in detention camps. Washington has blocked some imports, while Beijing has whipped

up Chinese consumer anger at brands that express concern about possible forced labor.

"The so-called human rights and forced labor issues in Xinjiang are completely inconsistent with the facts," said a Ministry of Commerce spokesman, Gao Feng.

"The U.S. approach has seriously undermined the security and stability of the global industrial chain and supply chain," he said. "China firmly opposes it." Gao gave no indication of possible Chinese retaliation.

The latest measure approved Wednesday by the U.S. Senate would block imports of goods made with forced labor in Xinjiang. The bill requires approval from the House of

Representatives. On Tuesday, the Commerce Department and five other agencies warned companies with ties to the region they "run a high risk" of violating U.S. laws against forced labor.

In unusually forceful language, they said Beijing carries out "genocide and crimes against humanity" in Xinjiang including imprisonment, torture, rape, forced sterilization, forced labor and "draconian restrictions" on movement and religion.

Chinese officials deny accusations of abuses in Xinjiang. They say the camps are for job training and combating radicalism.

Washington and the European Union have imposed travel and financial sanctions on Chinese officials

accused of abuses in Xinjiang. The United States has blocked imports of cotton, tomatoes and materials to make solar panels from companies suspected of using forced labor.

Beijing retaliated by announcing unspecified penalties against American and European officials, a European think tank and two European researchers who study Xinjiang. □



In this April 23, 2021, file photo, a person stands in a tower on the perimeter of the Number 3 Detention Center in Dabancheng in western China's Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.

Associated Press

Mexico abandons fishing-free zone for endangered porpoise

By MARK STEVENSON

Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The Mexican government officially abandoned the policy of maintaining a fishing-free zone around the last 10 or so remaining vaquita marina. The measure announced Wednesday replaces the fishing-free "zero tolerance" zone in the upper Gulf of California with a sliding scale of punishments if more than 60 boats are seen in the area on multiple occasions.

Given that Mexico has been unable to enforce the current restrictions — which bans boats in the small area the sliding-scale punishments also seem doomed to irrelevance.

Environmental experts say the move essentially abandons the world's most endangered marine mammal to the gill nets that trap and drown them. The nets are set for totoaba, a fish whose swim bladder is a delicacy in China, and sells for thousands of dollars per pound (kilogram).

Alex Olivera, the Mexico representative for the Cen-



In this July 8, 2017 file photo, a young woman with the World Wildlife Fund carries a papier mache replica of the critically endangered porpoise known as the vaquita marina, during an event in front of the National Palace in Mexico City.

ter for Biological Diversity, said the rules establish a sliding scale of responses to a situation that shouldn't be allowed to occur in the first place. For example, the Agriculture and Fisheries Department says it will use 60% of its enforcement personnel if 20 fishing boats or less are seen in the restricted area. "This is stupid.

They are letting in dozens of boats."

"This is the end of the concept of zero tolerance," Olivera said. "There is just going to be dissuasion."

One conservation expert

herd have worked with Mexican marines to try to grab banned fishing nets from the area, but they are frequently outnumbered and attacked by fishermen, who have no fear at all of the marines.

In January, two fishermen rammed their small boat into a larger vessel used by Sea Shepherd to haul out nets. Sea Shepherd said its vessel, the Farley Mowat, was pulling illegal gill nets out of the waters of the gulf, also known as the Sea of Cortez, when people on a group of about a half dozen small, open fishing boats began tossing gasoline bombs at the vessel, setting the bow and another part of the ship afire.

The nets confiscated by Sea Shepherd vessels are expensive, so fishermen often harass the conservationists' boats to try to get them back. The fishermen claim they have not received compensation from the Mexican government for lost fishing income. Groups representing fishermen were not immediately available to comment. □

Associated Press

Cuba's leader lays some blame for protests on his government

HAVANA (AP) — Cuban President Miguel Díaz-Canel for the first time is offering some self-criticism while saying that government shortcomings in handling shortages and other problems played a role in this week's protests.

But in a televised address Wednesday night he also

called on Cubans to not act with hate a reference to the violence that occurred at some of the rare street demonstrations in which protesters voiced grievances over high prices, food shortages and power outages, while some people also called for a change in the gov-

ernment. Until now, the Cuban government had only blamed social media and the U.S. government for the weekend protests, which were the biggest seen in Cuba since a quarter century ago, when then-President Fidel Castro personally went into the streets to calm crowds of thousands furious over dire shortages following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its economic subsidies for the island.

Díaz-Canel, however, said that failings by the state played a role in the unrest. "We have to gain experience from the disturbances," he said. "We also have to carry out a critical analysis of our problems in order to act and overcome, and avoid their repetition." □



Special forces police patrol past the Riviera hotel in Havana, Cuba, Wednesday, July 14, 2021, days after protests.

Associated Press



infini
by Urvin Croes

Taste limitless possibilities at Infini, where Chef Urvin Croes and his team explores without boundaries and steps with both feet outside of the box to create his most sensational dishes yet. This meticulously designed restaurant located inside Blue Residences on scenic Eagle Beach is a chef's table concept with limited seating where diners are able to interact with the staff and other guests alike throughout the evening.

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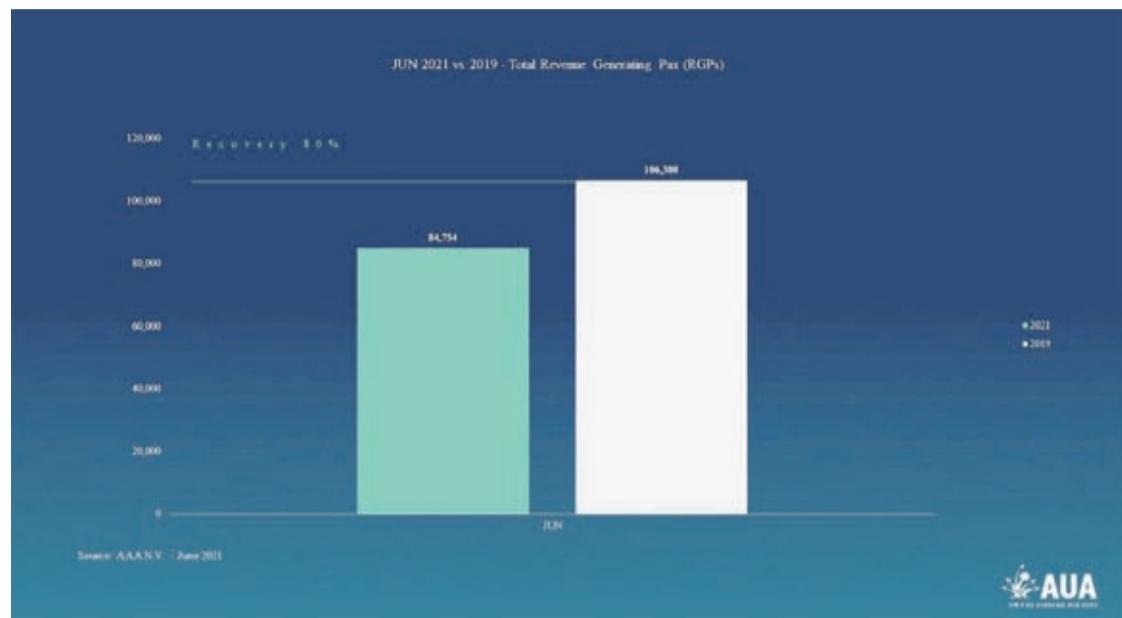
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LOCAL



AUA Airport's recovery continued during June 2021 84,754 passengers departed in June 2021



ORANJESTAD — Aruba Airport Authority N.V. (AAA) can report on AUA Airport's performance for June 2021, another month of solid recovery since the pandemic hit back in March 2020.

In June 2021, AUA Airport handled 84,754 departing

passengers. The amount of departing passengers was 20% more than the month before. During the past month, AUA Airport recovered 80% of the number of departing passengers who departed in 2019 during that same month. In June 2021, 74,566 passengers

(pax) traveled to the U.S., 4,384 pax to Europe, 2,235 pax to the Netherlands Antilles, and 3,569 pax to Latin America. The total departures during June are 83% more than what was forecasted for this month.

An average outbound Pas-

senger Load Factor (PLF) of 80% (number of occupied seats of the total amount of seats onboard an aircraft when departing from AUA Airport) was reached for the US Market during June 2021. The average PLF for all markets was 78% during that same period (compared to 2019, where the average PLF for all markets

was 85%).

During the past month, AUA Airport averaged 26 flights per day, down from 35 daily flights during the same period in 2019. In June 2020, we only handled 53 flights in the full month while our national border was closed for commercial operations.□



A special honoring at Amsterdam Manor Beach Resort

EAGLE BEACH — Recently, Kimberley Richardson of the Aruba Tourism Authority had the great pleasure to honor Aruba's loyal and friendly visitors as Distinguished Visitors of Aruba. The Distinguished Visitor certificate is presented on behalf of the Minister of Tourism, as a token of appreciation and to say 'Masha Danki', to the guests who visit Aruba 10 years and more consecutively.

This wonderful and thoughtful family stated that they love the island very much, especially for its year-round sunny weather, nice sandy beaches and picturesque sunsets, its safety, and Aruba's warm and friendly people whom have become like family to them. This couple not only fell in-love with the "One Happy Island" but they even got engaged and married here!

It was Mr. Bob & Mrs. Joan Grabowski's turn to get recognized. They have been visiting Aruba for 16 years! Their two daughters ages 4 and 6 have been to Aruba over 15 years combined. It is incredibly nice to see that Aruba has so many loyal visitors who still come year after year. □

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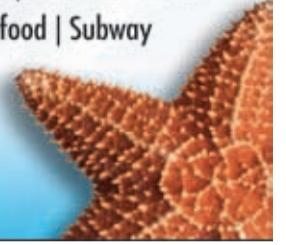
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Through unexpected circumstances and beyond Playa Linda keeps vacation momentum going

PALM BEACH – Playa Linda Beach Resort's ability to deliver an outstanding vacation experience, even during the height of unusual times, has been borne out in occupancy that is now very close to pre-pandemic levels. The momentum of its unstoppable hospitality has been driven by an equal measure of new ideas and an adherence to well-established core values. At the heart of the popular timeshare's success has been teamwork, and the sense of family it fosters among owners, guests as well as employees.

"Even during the most uncertain times, we pivoted to make the most of unexpected downtime. We used the opportunity to speed up existing renovation plans as well as launch new initiatives and resort projects with an eye on fortifying our position as a top choice for a safe, unforgettable Aruba stay," comments General Manager Peter van Grinsven. "Our team of employees was essential to the effort. We worked to keep everyone involved, on the job and focused on the end goal of offering our best."

The results have been undeniable, not only in the speed at which Playa Linda has regained its near normal occupancy rate, but also in being able to retain all of its amenities as well as debut additional options such as the brand new Fisherman's Hut restaurant. Beautification efforts were realized with even more upgrades to the common areas, including newly renovated beachside bathrooms, construction of an additional poolside Jacuzzi and landscaping enhanced throughout the resort property. Playa Linda was also able to complete the full renovation of all its spacious suites. At the same time, the resort put extra emphasis on maintaining new health and safety protocols, establishing an on-property testing center for guests as well as in providing additional support to employees in protecting their health and promoting vaccinations. At present, nearly 82% of Playa Linda employees are fully vaccinated.



"We always receive glowing commentary from guests about the friendliness and high level of service they receive from Playa Linda employees. We don't take our employees' dedication to the job for granted, and endeavor to show equal commitment to our team members," explains the General Manager: "We kept our full staff in place, both employees as well as contractors, at full pay and without using government wage subsidies, throughout the pandemic circumstances. Management and Co-op Board, and with the support of our membership, made it our priority to make sure we brought everyone through the difficult times and back to our sought after return to normalcy."

It is been no small feat, but Playa Linda, strengthened by its 38-year history, graced by an undeniably enviable Palm Beach location and with its loyal base of fans among both guests and employees, has certainly earned its rosy outlook for the future. The recent launch of a brand-new website of playalinda.com further touts the many aspects of what makes this resort truly special, within the already special destination of Aruba.

"We are grateful for everyone who holds a connection to the Playa Linda, lucky for our circumstances and ready to get back to simply doing what we do best," concludes the general manager.

The popular timeshare of Playa Linda Beach Resort is welcoming back owners and guests to its prime Palm Beach location with greater resort offerings and improved aesthetic appeal to better maximize the Aruba vacation experience. All its efforts are right on track in adhering to its ultimate goal of exceptional vacation experiences and effortless enjoyment of outstanding resort stays.

Playa Linda Beach Resort Aruba sits beachside on world famous Palm Beach, and at the center of the island's best selection of dining, shopping and activity options. It's 215 spacious suites -- featuring nine different suite categories, each with fully-equipped kitchens -- and resort amenities including on-property laundry facilities, two pools, two Jacuzzis, concierge services, daily activity program and varied dining and shopping options, create an upscale, community-centered environment for families, couples and friend groups seeking Aruba hospitality at its finest. □



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Mural Mosaic Art Project at Paseo Herencia

PALM BEACH - Paseo Herencia continues with its Mural Art projects around the Paseo Herencia Plaza with the local artist "Omaira Silva".

About the Local Artist

Omaira is a kind, motivated and inspiration driven local artist, who has brought her artistic creation to Paseo Herencia. With her active spirit and enjoyment in her work, everyone in Paseo Herencia including tourists were involved and excited with her mosaic creation.

With years of experience, Omaira has created this amazing art piece with ease and precision. Paseo Herencia is proud to present her "Love is in the Air" mosaic wall art design.

Love is in the air
Omaira's art creation

has an interactive design where visitors can hold the beautiful big red bow that is attached to unique heart balloons.

Making it an eye stopper for your social feed. Certainly, a design that will lift your spirits. Catch her beautiful mosaic mural art near the Paseo Mall entrance next to Maggy's and King Churros.

Aruba Artist Gallery

Omaira has inspired many to pursue their artistic abilities and now continues with her Aruba Artist Gallery @ Paseo. Hereby, artists will now have the ability to showcase their art pieces in this Artist Community Gallery, accessible to both locals and tourists. As a result, a new way to reconnect with other artists and community.



Let's spread creativity, inspiration and cultivate the Love of Arts, at Paseo Herencia. □

As good citizens let us protect our marine life



ORANJESTAD - There are several protected species in Aruba. These species are protected by the Nature Protection Ordinance (Natuurbeschermsverordening).

According to our local laws, it is prohibited to kill, capture, harm, bother or

take the eggs of protected species.

Protected species

The protected species include all corals, various seagrass, all type of mangroves, all species of parrotfish (Scaridae), Nassau Grouper (Jacupeper), Warsaw grouper (Djukfes),

whale shark, Atlantic Blue Fin Tuna, lobster, all conch, all turtles, black sea urchin (*diadema antillarum*), sea star, sea horse, Hydrocorallina (coral), sawfish, manta rays, pelicans, 2 type of hammerhead sharks (*Sphyrna mokarran* y *Sphyrna lewini*), 3 type of conch of the *Conus* family, Caribbean Crown Conch and also whales and dolphins.

Why protect marine life?

Marine life is an essential part of the ecosystem that is of great value to our biodiversity. Our marine life is also of the essence for tourism, our most important

economic industry, and our fishing industry. Balanced and sustainable development is beneficial for everyone and can help restore and maintain healthy marine life. Furthermore, a healthy marine life helps with food security and contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Prime Minister Evelyn Wever-Croes urges every citizen of our country to contribute and protect our nature. By doing so, we can ensure the healthy marine life and development of our beloved island. □



Facebook asks recusal of FTC head in antitrust case decision

By MARCY GORDON

AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP)—Facebook is asking that the new head of the Federal Trade Commission step away from decisions on whether to continue the agency's antitrust case against the social network giant, asserting that past public criticism of the company's market power makes it impossible for her to be impartial.

Facebook Inc. petitioned the agency Wednesday to remove Chair Lina Khan from taking part in decisions on the FTC's antitrust lawsuit against the company. A federal judge recently dismissed the suit by the FTC and one from a coalition of states, saying they didn't provide enough evidence to prove that Facebook is a monopoly in the social networking market. The judge, however, allowed the FTC to revise its complaint and try again.

Khan has been a persistent critic of Amazon, Google and Apple, as well as Facebook.

FTC officials declined comment on Facebook's motion, which came two weeks after Amazon requested that Khan be removed from taking part in



In this April 21, 2021, file photo, Lina Khan, nominee for Commissioner of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), speaks during a Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation confirmation hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington.

Associated Press

antitrust investigations of that company. The agency could be expected to respond formally at some point. Khan has said she would seek the opinion of FTC ethics monitors if issues arose of potential conflict of interest. It's not known how internal FTC rules on conflict of interest might be interpreted in this case. On the face of it, though, "the fact that (Khan) has a point of view and has expressed

it forcefully is not a basis for recusal," said Stephen Gillers, a law professor at New York University who is an expert on ethics.

In its petition, Facebook cited a 1966 ruling by a federal court disqualifying the FTC chair at the time from participating in a proceeding against the defendant company because he had earlier investigated many of the same facts concerning the company as a con-

gressional aide. As counsel to a House Judiciary antitrust panel in 2019 and 2020, Khan played a key role in an extensive bipartisan investigation of the market power of tech giants, including Facebook. In the 1966 case, then-FTC chair Paul Rand Dixon likely had access to relevant information through his congressional work. Gillers said that for Khan, who likely helped write the House

committee's report on its investigation, the question is did she herself develop facts regarding Facebook in doing so, and in her current role will she be called upon to decide whether those facts are true. In other words, will she be judging the accuracy of her own prior work?

The requests from Facebook and Amazon come as the four tech giants fall under extreme scrutiny and legislative pressure from the FTC, the Justice Department, European regulators, lawmakers in Washington, and, most recently, from an executive order from the White House.

"When a new commissioner has already drawn factual and legal conclusions and deemed the target a lawbreaker, due process requires that individual to recuse herself from related matters when acting in the capacity of an FTC commissioner," Facebook said in its petition. "Chair Khan has consistently made public statements not only accusing Facebook of conduct that merits disapproval, but specifically expressing her belief that the conduct meets the elements of an antitrust offense." □

Microsoft says it blocked spying on rights activists, others

By ALAN SUDERMAN

Associated Press

RICHMOND, Va. (AP)—Microsoft said Thursday it has blocked tools developed by an Israeli hacker-for-hire company that were used to spy on more than 100 people around the world, including politicians, human rights activists, journalists, academics and political dissidents.

Microsoft issued a software update and worked with the Citizen Lab at the University of Toronto to investigate the secretive Israeli company behind the hacking efforts. Citizen Lab said the company goes by several names including Candiru, which according to legend is a parasitic fish found in the Amazon that attacks human private

parts.

Microsoft said people targeted in "precision attacks" by the spyware were located in the Palestinian territory, Israel, Iran, Lebanon, Yemen, Spain, the United Kingdom, Turkey, Armenia, and Singapore. Microsoft did not name the targets but described them generally by category.

Citizen Lab said Candiru's spyware infrastructure included websites "masquerading as advocacy organizations" such as Amnesty International and Black Lives Matter.

The reports by Microsoft and Citizen Lab shine new light on an opaque and lucrative industry of selling sophisticated hacking tools to governments and

law enforcement agencies. Critics say such tools are often misused by authoritarian governments against innocent people.

"A world where private

sector companies manufacture and sell cyber-weapons is more dangerous for consumers, businesses of all sizes and governments," Microsoft said

in a blog post.

Attempts to reach representatives of Candiru were unsuccessful.

Microsoft said the business model for companies such as Candiru is to sell its services to government agencies, which then likely choose the targets and run the operations themselves. Citizen Lab published parts of what it said were a leaked proposal by Candiru for hacking services that offered a la carte hacking options. For 16 million euros (\$18.9 million), the company would allow the customer to monitor 10 devices simultaneously in a single country. For an extra 5.5 million euros (\$6.5 million), 25 additional devices could be monitored in five more countries. □



This April 12, 2016, file photo shows the Microsoft logo in Issy-les-Moulineaux, outside Paris, France.

Associated Press

Video games coming to Netflix? Latest hiring offers a clue



This Jan. 29, 2010, file photo shows the company logo and view of Netflix headquarters in Los Gatos, Calif.

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE
AP Technology Writer

SAN RAMON, Calif. (AP) —

Netflix has hired veteran video game executive Mike Verdu, signaling the video streaming service is poised to expand into another fertile field of entertainment.

Verdu's addition as Netflix's vice president of game development, confirmed Thursday, comes as the company seeks to sustain the momentum it gathered last year when people turned to the video streaming service to get through lockdowns imposed during the pandemic.

Netflix wound up adding 37 million worldwide subscribers last year, by far the largest annual gain in its history. But the landscape has changed dramatically now that the easing pandemic has allowed people to return to a semblance of their normal lives.

The video service stumbled out of the gate during the first three months of this year, posting its smallest first-quarter subscriber increase in four years, and it predicted its springtime gains would also be meager. The Los Gatos, California, company is scheduled to report its results for the April-June period on Tuesday.

Adding video games would give Netflix another way to build upon the

nearly 208 million subscribers that it boasted at the end of March. It wouldn't come as a surprise either, given that Netflix co-CEO Reed Hastings has long said the company competes as much against video games for a piece of people's leisure time as it does against other video streaming services offered by the likes of Amazon, Hulu, Walt Disney Co. and Apple.

Netflix didn't directly comment on its potential entry into video gaming, but left little doubt about its intent by announcing Verdu's title at the company. Verdu is joining Netflix from Facebook's Oculus, where he oversaw the virtual reality

headset maker's games. He previously worked at video game makers Electronic Arts and Zynga. Now the biggest questions are when Netflix might start to offer video games and whether it intends to charge a separate fee to play them or include them as part of its video streaming services.

In a research note, CFRA analyst Tuna Amobi called video games a logical complement to Netflix's vast library of TV series and films, helping to set the stage for eventual price increases that most subscribers will accept.

Greg Peters, Netflix's chief operating officer, told investors in April that video

games could be another way to engage subscribers already immersed in the stories unfolding in the service's TV series and movies. "We're trying to figure out what are all these different ways that we can increase those points of connection, we can deepen that fandom," Peters said at the time. Verdu will be reporting to Peters in his new job. Investors seemed to be taking a wait-and-see attitude on Netflix's potential foray into video games. □

Associated Press

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Review: Doc explores Anthony Bourdain's own 'parts unknown'

By JOCELYN NOVECK

AP National Writer

There are many startling moments in "Roadrunner," Morgan Neville's rich and moving documentary about the singular culinary storyteller Anthony Bourdain, who tragically took his life at the age of 61.

Here's just one that sticks out: a quick scene with a therapist, in Argentina. As Bourdain lies on her couch, cameras rolling for an episode of his show, he describes some frightening psychological urges he has. She asks him if he wants to change, and to feel differently. He replies: "I suspect it's too late."

We never learn here why Bourdain wanted to film what seems a genuine therapy session. But it fits in perfectly with the portrait Neville paints of a man who couldn't resist being anything but painfully honest, and painfully public, even when it took him down some dark paths.

It's also an example of just how much material Neville had to work with. Between Bourdain's own recordings and voiceovers, copious footage much never seen from production of his TV travelogues, and countless home movies and photos, it comes to feel like Bourdain himself is narrating his life story. And it's hard to shake the feeling he already knows what



This image released by Focus Features shows Anthony Bourdain in Morgan Neville's documentary "Roadrunner."

happens, especially when he quips early on: "Here's a little pre-emptive truth-telling: there's no happy ending."

Neville dispenses quickly with the early stuff Bourdain dropping out of college, washing dishes in Cape Cod even his years as chef at Manhattan's Brasserie Les Halles. It really starts at age 44, when "Kitchen Confidential," his wickedly funny memoir about the underbelly of the restaurant world, catapults him into stardom and a life as a globetrotting raconteur bold enough to swallow a still-beating cobra

heart or a sheep's testicle. The transformation is dizzying: People are shouting to Bourdain in the streets. He's sitting down with Letterman, and with Oprah. They're saying Brad Pitt wants to play him. "It was like he died and was reborn," says his brother, Chris Bourdain.

In footage from his various shows, which culminated with "Parts Unknown" on CNN, we accompany Bourdain to an idyllic lunch in Provence with chef-buddy Eric Ripert, or to Vietnam, where he guzzles that cobra heart. Or to Haiti, where an episode on local cuisine

leads to a chaotic scene of hungry youths seeking food. In a 2006 episode of "No Reservations" shot in Beirut, violence flares up between Israel and Hezbollah, and the crew is left to lounge by a pool for days while conflict rages. "I had begun to believe the dinner table was the great leveler," Bourdain says. "Now I'm not so sure."

A casualty of Bourdain's outsized fame is his first marriage. Nancy Putkoski doesn't speak to Neville, but Bourdain's second wife does -- Ottavia Busia, with whom he shared a daughter. Her tearful regret

Associated Press

at not having kept a closer eye on him once their marriage was over is one of the more moving moments of the film, as is the frank commentary -- loving, sad and angry all at once -- from celebrity chef David Chang. The tears flow copiously in this film, a credit to Neville's vibrant filmmaking. Chang also has one of the catchiest lines about his friend: "It was almost never about food. It was about Tony learning to be a better person."

The first two-thirds are fittingly exhilarating. It's hard not to be jealous of a man who freely admitted he had the best job in the world: "If I'm not happy, it's a failure of imagination," he once told The New Yorker magazine.

But if imagination was all it took to be happy, this film makes clear, Bourdain would likely be with us today.

The final act of "Roadrunner" is infused with a feeling of dread. Bourdain had become involved with Italian actor Asia Argento, a key accuser of Harvey Weinstein. She directed an episode of his "Parts Unknown" in Hong Kong, and we literally watch Bourdain falling in love. We also hear how devastated he was when a tabloid published pictures of her with another man, shortly before his death during filming in eastern France. □

Obama adapts 'Dreams from My Father' for young readers

NEW YORK (AP) — More than 25 years after its original publication, former President Barack Obama's memoir "Dreams from My Father" will be released in a young adult edition.

Obama had yet to hold any political office when "Dreams from My Father" was released in 1995. His account of his early years reached a vast audience after he ran for president in 2008 and is widely considered one of the best books ever written by a politician. "Dreams from My Father" has sold more than 7 million copies worldwide and has been translated into more than 40 languages.

The young readers edition, announced Wednesday by Random House Children's Books, comes out Oct. 5 and will feature a new introduction by the former president.

"The young man you meet in these pages is flawed and full of yearning, asking questions of himself and the world around him, learning as he goes," Obama writes. "I know now, of course, that this was just the beginning for him. If you're lucky, life provides you with a good long arc."

Obama's wife, former first lady Michelle Obama, released a young readers edition of her memoir "Becoming" earlier this year. □



Former U.S. President Barack Obama gesture as he attends the "values-based leadership" during a plenary session of the Gathering of Rising Leaders in the Asia Pacific, organized by the Obama Foundation in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, on Dec. 13, 2019.

Associated Press

Pogacar wins final Tour mountain stage, cements overall lead

LUZ ARDIDEN, France (AP) — After Tadej Pogacar won the final mountain stage of the Tour de France on Thursday to cement his grip on the race, the young Slovenian had four more climbs to complete.

Unlike the two mammoth ascents he mastered earlier in the day, these ones were small: Pogacar stepped four times atop the podium in the Luz Ardiden ski resort as his rewards for winning the stage and retaining the leader's yellow jersey, as well as for leading the standings as best climber and best young rider.

Just call it total dominance. Only 24 hours after winning another climbing classic at the Col du Portet, the 22-year-old Pogacar became only the fourth rider in Tour history to win consecutive summit finishes at cycling's biggest race. The defending champion has indeed been toying with his rivals this summer. He had waited until the penultimate stage to take control of the Tour last year but did it after only five stages this summer with a stunning display in the first time trial. He was untouched-



Slovenia's Tadej Pogacar, wearing the overall leader's yellow jersey, celebrates as he crosses the finish line to win the eighteenth stage of the Tour de France cycling race over 129.7 kilometers (80.6 miles) with start in Pau and finish in Luz Ardiden, France, Thursday, July 15, 2021.

Associated Press

able in the Alps where he seized the yellow jersey and wrapped up the demolition work in the Pyrenees.

Barring an accident, the UAE Team Emirates rider should be crowned Tour champion for the second straight year when the race ends in Paris on Sunday.

Before Sunday's proces-

sional ride leading to the Champs-Elysees, there is just one difficult stage remaining a time trial through the Bordelais vineyards scheduled Saturday. Pogacar excels in the race against the clock and won the first time trial of this year's Tour, beating the pure specialists. Pogacar has a huge lead of five minutes, 45 seconds

over Vingegaard in the general classification. Carapaz is in third place, 5:51 off the pace.

"Still three days, but it looks good," Pogacar said.

The short trek in the Pyrenees featured a daunting combination of the Col du Tourmalet and the final sharp climb to the Luz-Ardiden, two classics of the

Tour. Pogacar's main rivals did not take advantage of the brutal course and he was never under threat. Pogacar surged away from a reduced group of four riders in the last kilometer. After Enric Mas attacked, Pogacar countered the move and dropped Jonas Vingegaard and Richard Carapaz to claim a third stage win this year and win his second straight mountaintop finish.

The stage start was overshadowed by the news that the Bahrain Victorious team had been raided by French police as part of a doping investigation.

The team confirmed that riders' rooms were searched by officers at the hotel it stayed in on Thursday in the southwestern city of Pau.

In a statement to The Associated Press, the Marseille prosecutor in charge of the case said a preliminary investigation targeting members of the team was opened on July 3 "for acquisition, transport, possession, import of a substance or method prohibited for use by an athlete without medical justification." □

Bradley Beal out of Olympics for health and safety reasons

**By BRIAN MAHONEY
AP Basketball Writer**

Bradley Beal will miss the Olympics after being placed into health and safety protocols and the U.S. men's basketball team said it will replace him on its roster at a later date. The Americans also announced Thursday that forward Jerami Grant has also been placed in health and safety protocols "out of an abundance of caution."

Beal had started all three exhibition games for the U.S. so far in Las Vegas, averaging 10.3 points on 10-for-21 shooting.

The Washington Wizards guard was second in the NBA this season with 31.3

points per game. Coach Gregg Popovich said it was devastating news for Beal and his family.

"I'm dying for him," Popovich said. "We all are."

Beal was expected to play for the Americans two years ago in the Basketball World Cup in China, but had to withdraw from consideration before training camp for family reasons.

He finally had his chance to suit up for the senior national team now and he seemed ready for it.

After scoring just two points in the Americans' loss to Nigeria in their opener, he followed with 12 points against Australia and then had 17 on Monday against Argentina in the first U.S.

victory.

"Bradley is no doubt, he's a huge loss. He was playing every well, understanding everything and fit in well with the group," Popovich said. "So there's no next Bradley Beal."

Beal's NBA team was hit hard by a coronavirus outbreak early in the season and every club had to navigate players going in and out of the lineup because of the strict protocols in place.

Golden State's Draymond Green said it's difficult to see the impact the virus still has after 17 or 18 months. "The experience, the opportunity to represent your country is one that you all dream about growing up,"



United States' Bradley Beal brings the ball up court against Argentina during the second half of an exhibition basketball game in Las Vegas on Tuesday, July 13, 2021.

Associated Press

Green said. "So to see that opportunity taken away, you can only sympathize with Brad."

The Americans have already been playing short-handed during their exhibition games, with Khris Middleton and Jrue Holiday of Milwaukee and Devin Booker of Phoenix

playing in the NBA Finals. Popovich said the challenge for the Americans will be finding a player who is in good shape, after the NBA regular season ended in May.

He said they are going through names who are available and trying to see who would be a fit. □

Oosthuizen, Spieth lead way as normalcy returns to Open

By STEVE DOUGLAS

AP Sports Writer

SANDWICH, England (AP)

— Jordan Spieth rolled in putts like it was 2017. Louis Oosthuizen put those runner-up finishes in the last two majors out of mind and soared to the top of the leaderboard. They gave the British Open a familiar feel on Thursday.

Normalcy returned to the wind-swept links at Royal St. George's in other ways, too.

The roars and cheers of the biggest golf crowd since the pandemic rumbled around this quirky course off Sandwich Bay, just like pre-COVID times.

For Spieth, that was as welcome as being an Open contender once again.

"It feels inside the ropes, from the first tee forward, the most normal of any tournament we have played thus far relative to that same tournament in previous years," Spieth said. His 5-under 65 certainly turned back time to four years ago when he lifted the claret jug at Royal Birkdale the last English venue to host the British Open when he was hitting the ball better than he ever has.

Spieth was a shot off the lead held by Oosthuizen, who saved par from a fairway bunker on No. 18 for a 6-under 64. That tied the lowest opening round at Royal St. George's, previously set by Christy O'Connor Jr. in 1981.

That didn't look as though it would be the case after the South African opened with seven straight pars. He followed with six birdies in his next nine holes.

"I've learnt over the years playing major championships that patience is the key thing," said Oosthui-



United States' Jordan Spieth, left, bombs fists with United States' Bryson DeChambeau on the 18th green after their first round at the British Open Golf Championship at Royal St George's golf course Sandwich, England, Thursday, July 15, 2021.

Associated Press

zen, who hasn't won one of them since the British Open at St. Andrews in 2010. There have been six runner-up finishes in the majors since then, including in the last two.

Oosthuizen and Spieth were among the morning starters who enjoyed the best of the conditions, notably soft bounces on the most undulating fairways and greens on the Open rotation.

Yet many of the world's best couldn't take advantage.

Patience already might be wearing thin for U.S. Open champion Jon Rahm, who slapped his thigh in frustration after making a double-bogey at No. 9, where he took two shots to get out of a pot bunker in the fairway. He shot 71, like Bryson DeChambeau, who spent much of his first round up to his knees in deep grass and cursing his driver, saying it "sucks" after being unable to use his power to over-

whelm Royal St. George's. Shane Lowry, the Open winner in 2019, also shot 71 in front of a crowd that has a daily capacity of 32,000 this week. Not since Royal Portrush, where Lowry won, has any golf tournament seen so many spectators through the gates.

With last year's event canceled because of the pandemic, Lowry could finally be announced at an Open as the reigning champion golfer.

"It was a very special day for me," he said.

Not so for the majority of the afternoon starters, who encountered more prolonged gusts off the English Channel and slightly drier conditions.

Rory McIlroy birdied the last to salvage a 70 in his bid for his first major title in seven years. Justin Thomas shot 72. Phil Mickelson shot 80, his highest start ever in the British Open, that left him tied for last place.

Benjamin Hebert and

Webb Simpson, with rounds of 66 that tied them for fourth place with three others, had the best scores from the afternoon. Former PGA champion Collin Morikawa, in his first links test, and English favorite Tommy Fleetwood were at 67.

Fleetwood would like nothing more than to become the first Englishman with his name on that silver jug since Nick Faldo in 1992.

"It's been a long time since an Englishman has won the Open, and I would love to be the next one. So we'll see," Fleetwood said.

Brian Harman was tied for second with Spieth after making five birdies in his first eight holes and finishing with a 65. Top-ranked Dustin Johnson hit 14 greens in regulation and said he was pleased with his round of 68 that had him in a tie for 19th.

Spieth had not won since Birkdale until he ended his slump at the Texas Open in April. He looked the happiest of anyone Thursday, saying he liked where his game was at after matching his lowest score at an Open. He also had a 65 on the first day at Birkdale.

And he made reference to that victory while running off four straight birdies starting at No. 5, telling former caddie John Wood part of

the U.S. broadcast team that it was just like 2017 the way he was making putts and Wood was watching him. Wood was caddying in the final round at Birkdale for Matt Kuchar, who was second.

"Here I feel for the first time since then I'm at least coming in with a bit of form, a bit of confidence, and really my start lines off the tee," Spieth said.

It was only Oosthuizen ahead of him. And that was no real shock, considering the South African was tied for the lead in the first and third rounds at last month's U.S. Open and in the second round at the PGA Championship in May. The return of the spectators made it feel like a proper Open, especially on the hill overlooking the par-3 6th hole that attracted some of the biggest galleries of a day that started with a blue, cloudless sky.

Just before midday, the group containing Stewart Cink, Lee Westwood and Martin Kaymer all hit tee shots inside 6 feet of the pin. As they walked onto the green, one spectator shouted: "You three should be professionals."

To which Kaymer's caddie, Craig Connolly, replied back across the green: "You should be a comedian."

"I feel like the fans here are very knowledgeable about the sport," Spieth said, "and they're also having a great time." □

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